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DOI:

[10.1080/10670564.2019.1594107](https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1594107)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Walsh, B. (2019). China's Pervasive yet Forgotten Regional Security Role in Africa. *Journal of contemporary china*, 28(120), 965-983. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1594107>

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## **China's pervasive yet forgotten Regional Security role in Africa**

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### **Abstract**

*This article argues for a re-examination of China's engagement with Africa. Rather than offering broad continental generalisations, or concentrating only on individual country case-studies, researchers and analysts would be better served by recognising and understanding the specific and varied regional contexts in which relations occur. Utilising Hettne's conception of regionalism and regionalisation processes, and over one hundred field work interviews, the article presents a broad continental overview of China's role in Africa followed by a more detailed case study of China's role in East Africa. The article argues that the regional reality of African security dynamics enmeshes China into intra-regional geopolitics and complex local level security issues, and sees the relationship greatly affected by the varied behaviour and agency of the African leaders.*

### **Introduction**

China's relationship with Africa from 2000 onwards is a distinct period in their shared, deeply interwoven history. Chinese presence in Africa has greatly transformed over the last 18 years and counting. It has created a complex, dynamic and often misunderstood relationship. The previous decades of cooperation - oft-referenced by current leaders from both China and Africa - was far more fluctuating and problematic than is now proclaimed. Now, too, the modern era is far more complicated than leaders would perhaps like to publicise.<sup>1</sup>

The modern relationship, heralded as a win-win scenario between erstwhile south-south allies, is multi-faceted and non-linear: but China's thirst for oil and natural resources remains centrally important.<sup>2</sup> The Forum for China-African Cooperation (FOCAC) has garnered attention as a grandiose biennial celebration of the relationship, and engagement with Africa's different Regional Economic Communities (RECs) does occur to varying degrees. But China retains a fundamentally state-centric focus. Beijing champions its non-interference principle more loudly than ever when protecting its bilateral relationships. China's impact on African security issues, therefore, is less obvious than some other world powers which has resulted in a dearth of analysis. Africa's inherently regional character is simultaneously missed from much China-Africa literature, which is particularly important to assessing security dynamics.

This article argues for a re-examination of China's engagement with Africa. Rather than offering broad continental generalisations, or concentrating only on individual country case-

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<sup>1</sup> Leaders today tend to ignore: Chinese support for African rebel movements against non-white, democratically elected, independent governments; China's cynical manipulation of African states and rebel movements during the Sino-Soviet dispute; China's 'withdrawal' from Africa during the 1980s, which certainly occurred despite certain relations being maintained; and the African states failing to condemn China following the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

<sup>2</sup> Sigfrido Caceres and Sophal Ear, 'The Geopolitics of China's Global Resources Quest', *Geopolitics* 17(1), (2012), p. 62.

studies, researchers and analysts would be better served by recognising and understanding the specific and varied regional contexts in which relations occur. It begins with the premises that: African security issues are inevitably affected by China due to their historic and expanding presence on the continent, despite Beijing's non-interference principle and apparent aversion to 'traditional' military responses; and that Africa's regional character must be understood and analysed in order to uncover these effects.

The article asks how are Africa's regional security issues impacted upon by China and how are China-Africa relations affected therein? It utilises Hettne's concepts of regionalism and regionalisation processes, and a holistic, constructivist security framework, to argue that both the Chinese state and China-Africa scholars often misunderstand important regional nuances within African security dynamics. The article discusses the varied security issues and state building processes underway in each African region, focusing on a few key areas where China seemingly plays a role in security issues therein. It showcases how African security dynamics enmesh China into intra-regional geopolitics and complex local-level security issues and sees the relationship greatly affected by the varied behaviour and agency of the African leaders encountered. The article then provides a more detailed case study analysis of how these trends manifest in East Africa, highlighting the region's interesting specificities that, although varied and unique, offer insights into the wider China-Africa relationship. The starting point of analysis is Africa's regional security, not Chinese action, resulting in a more African-centric analysis that is often missed by other scholars.

This article is based on over four years of research, mostly undertaken as part of the author's PhD programme. This included over one hundred semi-structured fieldwork interviews conducted with politicians, diplomats, military personnel, government officials, security analysts and local citizens. Interviews were mostly conducted in East Africa from 2013 to 2015, along with several in South Africa during various FOCAC VI side-line events in December 2015. This article also forms part of the African Leadership Centre's ongoing research agenda, titled Peace, Society and the State in Africa.

Following this introduction, the below section explains that China-Africa scholars have mostly failed to articulate the regional character of relations which has contributed to the lack of serious security analysis. The article then discusses the utility of Hettne's concepts of regionalism and regionalisation, in understanding the African Union's formal regional institution building efforts and the more complex informal regional dynamics shaping security issues. The following section offers a broad description of China's regional role across the continent. It focuses on a few useful examples of how China has impacted security somewhat differently in each African region, in regard to geopolitical relations, local security issues and the different national leaders who have both utilised and resisted China's presence to varying extents. Subsequently, the article offers a more detailed case study of China's role in East Africa, showcasing China's role within regional integration, the oil sector, and anti-terrorist efforts. It notes President Museveni of Uganda as a particularly influential leader exercising agency against China. The article then calls for a regional analytical framework for scholarship assessing China-Africa relations, particularly regarding security analyses. Finally, the conclusion suggests that China should also pursue a more sophisticated and nuanced regional strategy in Africa, which will be difficult to achieve under its current state-centric mindset.

### **Lack of regional security analysis**

Two major, interlinked gaps appear within the China-Africa literature: lack of a regional analysis, which contributes to the lack of serious security analysis. China-Africa scholarship

tends to be either overly broad by looking at ‘China in Africa’ or concentrated on country-specific case studies (which still lean toward obvious, somewhat infamous examples such as Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Angola).<sup>3</sup> Regional analyses that do occur are under-emphasised. Taylors 2006 work, for example, titled ‘China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise,’ is actually a series of case study chapters on China in Southern Africa. This choice of Southern Africa is justified by it being ‘the centre of attention for Beijing on the continent... (and) emblematic of various historical and current tendencies that have staked out Beijing’s engagement with the wider continent.’<sup>4</sup> Although true to some extent, this ultimately ignores the interesting specificities of Southern Africa as compared to other regional relations. Other regional assessments tend to focus on Africa’s Regional Economic Communities,<sup>5</sup> or the African Union (AU) more generally.<sup>6</sup> These efforts, however, often retain Chinese actions as their entry point: Van Hoeymissen sees Chinese actions at the UN as being of prime interest, for example, and Ikome concentrates on FOCAC and then assesses where the AU fits in.

In the security studies field, China’s apparent lack of ‘Western-style’ overt interference almost forces scholars to accept a broader conceptualisation of ‘security.’ Alden, for example, discusses Beijing’s concern with citizens’ security, reputational security, and firm-level security.<sup>7</sup> Human security issues have become increasingly prominent in relation to the rivalry between local Africans and Chinese immigrants, especially local market traders.<sup>8</sup> Some assume that a conflict is brewing between the US and China over their rival interests on the continent that will greatly impact African security, but this remains entirely speculative at present.<sup>9</sup> Chinese UN anti-piracy Naval efforts in the Gulf of Eden have garnered attention (which will increase due to the new Chinese military base in Djibouti),<sup>10</sup> and arms sales to Africa are also flagged.<sup>11</sup>

There is interest in China’s financial contributions to the AU’s African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), although these actually remain paltry compared to the West (even

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon’s Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (CITY: Oxford University Press, 2009); Chris Alden, *China in Africa*, (London: Zed Books, 2007); Daniel Large, ‘China & the Contradictions of ‘Non-interference’ in Sudan’, *Review of African Political Economy* 35(115), (2008), pp. 93-106; Lucy Corkin, *Uncovering African Agency: Angola’s Management of China’s Credit Lines* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013); Abiodun Alao, ‘China and Zimbabwe: The Context and Contents of a Complex Relationship’, *SAIIA Occasional Paper* 202, October 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Taylor, *China and Africa Engagement and Compromise* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Sara Van Hoeymissen, ‘Regional Organizations in China’s Security Strategy for Africa: The Sense of Supporting “African Solutions to African Problems”’, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40(4), (2011), pp. 91-118; Courtney Fung, ‘Global South solidarity? China, regional organisations and intervention in the Libyan and Syrian civil wars’, *Third World Quarterly* 37(1), (2016), pp. 33-50.

<sup>6</sup> Francis Ikome, ‘The role and place of the African Union in the emerging China-Africa partnership’, in Axel Harneit-Sievers et al, eds. *Chinese and African Perspectives on China in Africa* (Oxford: Pambazuka, 2010), pp. 201-212

<sup>7</sup> Chris Alden, ‘Seeking security in Africa: China’s evolving approach to the African Peace and Security Architecture’, *NOREF*, March, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Howard French, *China’s Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Yun Sun and John Thornton, ‘China in Africa: Implications for US Competition and Diplomacy’, *Brookings Institute*, 2012; Loyd Thrall, ‘China’s Expanding African Relations: Implications for US National Security’, *RAND Corporation*, California, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Marc Lanteigne, ‘Fire over water: China’s strategic engagement of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden crisis’, *The Pacific Review* 26(3), (2013) pp. 289-312; Chinese military base takes shape in Djibouti, *The Financial Times*, 12 July 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/bc8a2820-66e1-11e7-8526-7b38dcaef614> (accessed 23/02/19).

<sup>11</sup> Pádraig Carmody and Ian Taylor, ‘Flexigemony and Force in China’s Resource Diplomacy in Africa: Sudan and Zambia Compared’ *Geopolitics*, 15(3), (2010), p. 497; Lauren Dickey, ‘Weapons-for-Oil Exchanges in Contemporary Sino-African Relations’, *Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal* 1(1), (2011), pp. 63-85.

following FOCAC VI's pledge of \$60 million over three years towards APSA which was a major increase on previous sums).<sup>12</sup> Shinn and Eisenmann's invaluable summary discusses security relations across Africa but remains broad and military-centric.<sup>13</sup> The other most serious and compelling effort to date, Alden et al's recent edited work specifically focusing on China's new security role, still lacks the essential regional element. It instead details many of the aforementioned issues, case studies and continental patterns.<sup>14</sup> The 'region' to analyse remains Africa, rather than the African sub-regions so crucial to the continent's security dynamics.

While the above works are unquestionably valid and valuable, a more bottom-up, genuine and in-depth regional security analysis is lacking. We know that Chinese interest in African security issues *are* increasing to some extent with the various declarations and initiatives prevalent at FOCAC meetings and in Chinese White Papers.<sup>15</sup> Yet no obvious paradigm shift in Beijing's ideology or methodology is readily apparent: non-interference might be mildly tweaked or twisted but is not about to be dismantled. Uncovering China's genuine impact on African security must move beyond assessing the public declarations or the few over-referenced case studies. Serious security analysis should contain a clear *regional* component wherever it occurs, but in the African context it is particularly important that this regional aspect to security dynamics is seen as centrally important.

### Identifying the 'Regional' impacts

The article starts from an International Political Economy viewpoint that sees regionalism as 'a comprehensive multidimensional programme, including economic, security, environmental and many other issues.'<sup>16</sup> Nation-States are important, but they are not the only unit of analysis or relevant actor in contemporary global politics, especially in Africa. China affects and is affected by, African intra-regional geopolitics through its supposedly state-to-state interactions which, in reality, involve a more complex, evolving set of actors than is assumed.

This article's conception of 'security' is likewise multidimensional. It takes a constructivist view that sees ideas, norms and values as important in shaping perceptions of (in)security whilst including the importance of materialist factors. Human security, which focuses on the individual as referent point, is useful and relevant, as is the role and importance of more 'traditional' factors and state leaders in shaping regional security concerns.<sup>17</sup> The local-level security issues identified below show China's influence and role beyond a simplistic, military-centric security analysis.

Unpacking and better understanding the state in Africa and African's experiences of (in)security allows for a clearer picture of China's role therein. Hettne's understanding that

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<sup>12</sup> Saferworld, 'China's growing role in African peace and security', *Saferworld Report*, January 2011, pp. 57-59; Sara Van Hoeymissen, 'Chinas Support to Africa's Regional Security Architecture', *The China Monitor* 49, (2010), pp. 10-15.

<sup>13</sup> David Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Chris Alden et al, eds. *China and Africa: Building Peace and Security Cooperation on the Continent* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> David Shinn, 'FOCAC: The evolving China-Africa security relationship', in FOCAC VI: African initiatives toward a sustainable Chinese relationship', CCS, 2015, p. 7; FOCAC VI Johannesburg Declaration, 25.4; FOCAC VII Beijing Action Plan, 6.1; Chinese State Council, China's Second Africa Policy Paper, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Bjorn Hettne, 'Beyond the 'New' Regionalism', *New Political Economy* 10(4), (2006), p. 549.

<sup>17</sup> Funmi Olanisakin, 'A Human Security Approach to Peacemaking in Africa', *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 37(1), (2015), p. 3; Yu-tai Tsai, The emergence of human security: A constructivist view, *International Journal of Peace Studies* (2009), pp. 19-33.

the 'national interest' is often, in fact, a group- or person- specific interest,<sup>18</sup> is particularly apt for the African context generally, as well as China's role within the continent's ongoing state-building processes. Soderbaum's notion of regime-boosting behaviour and shadow regionalism is also useful in problematising the African state, along with Bach's recognition of the survival and accumulation strategies being pursued.<sup>19</sup> Both recognise how state leaders are able to initiate (or prevent) particular regionalisation activities, both formal and informal, for their own personal wealth and power. The behaviour of particular leaders, and the different levels of agency and influence they enjoy domestically, regionally and internationally, plays a key role in shaping China's relations with the continent.

### ***African Regionalism and Regionalisation***

Globalisation and its more multi-polar system has included a trend towards a regionalised world, where regions form as a means of engaging with and protecting against the re-structured global order. Hettne sees 'five levels of regional complexity or regionness': a geographical or ecological grouping defined by natural boundaries; a social system with relations between different human groups across borders; an organized, institutional grouping cooperating in particular fields; as regional civil society, with more organised and converging communication and value systems; and a region acting as a distinct unit with agency.<sup>20</sup>

In Africa, *regionalism* – the political effort to organise states into particular cooperative groupings – occurs alongside, in competition with and sometimes contradicts *regionalisation* – the more complex social and less-formal processes by which particular regions may emerge.<sup>21</sup> The African Union has always been explicit and deliberate in creating regional structures as the necessary building blocks for continental integration.<sup>22</sup> The AU's belief in the importance of, and reliance upon, its RECs, along with the Regional Organisations and Regional Mechanisms (ROs and RMs) which form the African Peace and Security Architecture, is re-emphasised and re-iterated throughout Agenda 2063.<sup>23</sup> This is an effort to forge the continent's regions into Hettne's third category: a region creating institutional links and structures to form 'organized cooperation in any of the cultural, economic, political or military fields.'<sup>24</sup> The AU's regionalism has sought to institutionally frame and direct whatever organic regionalisation processes are occurring.

This African regionalism has always had security provision and promotion as centrally important (rather than merely as financial or socio-economic institutions). But, making use of Hettne's levels of regionness, it is clear that these are being forged to varying degrees of success along differing geographical, social and civil society groupings, with regionalisation

<sup>18</sup> Hettne, *Beyond the 'New' Regionalism*, p.554.

<sup>19</sup> Fredrik Söderbaum, *The Political Economy of Regionalism: The Case of Southern Africa* (Palgrave, 2003), pp. 68-69; Daniel Bach, 'The global politics of regionalism: Africa', in Mary Farrell et al, *Global politics of regionalism: theory and practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), pp. 171-186, p.184.

<sup>20</sup> Bjorn Hettne, *The New Regionalism: implications for Global Development and International Security* (Helsinki: United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, 1994), p. 1-8.

<sup>21</sup> Hettne, *Beyond the 'New' Regionalism*, pp. 544-545.

<sup>22</sup> African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) 2010 Assessment Study,

<http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/report-of-the-apsa-assessment-study-july-oct-2010-eng.pdf> (accessed 13 June 2016); Constitutive Act of the African Union, Article 3.1, 11 July 2010

[https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/32020-file-constitutiveact\\_en.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/32020-file-constitutiveact_en.pdf) (accessed 13 June 2016).

<sup>23</sup> An Overview of Agenda 2063 (AU Commission, 2015), [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-11\\_an\\_overview\\_of\\_agenda.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-11_an_overview_of_agenda.pdf) (accessed 10 December 2018); Agenda 2063, Popular Version May 2016 (AU Commission, 2015), [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-03\\_popular\\_version.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-03_popular_version.pdf) (accessed 10 December 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Hettne, *The New Regionalism*, p.7.



processes shifting their relevance. The ambition of them forming actor status within the international realm varies widely across the continent. Regional rivalries, security dynamics and the behaviours/ambitions of particular leaders greatly affect the regionalisation processes occurring outside the prescribed institutional frameworks.

This article groups Africa's regions below into North, East, Horn, Central, South, and West as a useful analytical tool and, admittedly, for ease. It agrees with Hettne that Africa is too dispersed, complex and varied to be classed as a 'region' in its own right.<sup>25</sup> The discussion of African *regions*, rather than *sub-regions*, is therefore deliberate. The AU's own literature, APSA framework and Agenda 2063 all make this same distinction.<sup>26</sup> The author understands that overlap, interplay and complex regional or sub-regional processes are, indeed at work. Further detailed insights into China's role in their unfurling is welcome. The scope of this article, however, does not allow it to waste time deciding whether a 'region' exists or not, which can be a distraction. Buzan and Weavers Regional Security Complex Theory, for example, insists that any one nation (or unit) can only belong to one regional security complex at any one time.<sup>27</sup> This greatly reduces its applicability to Africa, where regions cannot easily be delineated and demarcated from each other (overlapping membership of different RECs also occurs). But this does not mean a regional analysis of security dynamics cannot occur.

Below is a useful signposting exercise to flag the importance of this regional delineation of African security issues and China's role within the continent therein. The below sections focus largely on political and security issues, but this does not discount the utility in analysing alternative issues and actors (market traders, for example), but whatever unit is chosen a regional analysis would add value. This framework helps understand the three main areas of focus for this article, by which African agency within the China-Africa relationship occurs. Intra-regional geopolitics appears largely between states, whether within the institutionalised AU APSA or REC formations, or other regionalisation processes. Local-level security issues, understood within a constructivist and human security framework, impact upon the lower level, daily lives of Africans. Finally, leader behaviour - namely the way in which African leaders seek or gain leverage against China - sees the manipulation of domestic and regional processes, and Beijing's role within them.

## **China's varied continental role**

China's overwhelmingly state-centric, sovereignty-minded ideology with its emphasis on bilateral relationships has not prevented Africa's inherently regional security environment shaping Chinese impacts. African security dynamics enmesh China into complex regionalisation processes, where regional hegemons are pivotal to relations: they act as nodal states with notable degrees of influence in their respective regions. The Chinese role in African security issues impacts through three broad areas: intra-regional geopolitics; local-level security concerns; and the behaviour and abilities of African leaders. Relationships with formal Regional Organisations are varied and less relevant, although worth noting.

## ***Historical context***

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<sup>25</sup> Hettne, *Beyond the 'New' Regionalism*, p.566.

<sup>26</sup> The African Union, *Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union*, Durban, 9 July 2002, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7781-treaty-0024\\_-\\_protocol\\_relating\\_to\\_the\\_establishment\\_of\\_the\\_peace\\_and\\_security\\_council\\_of\\_the\\_african\\_union\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7781-treaty-0024_-_protocol_relating_to_the_establishment_of_the_peace_and_security_council_of_the_african_union_e.pdf) (accessed 23 May 2017); An Overview of Agenda 2063.

<sup>27</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and powers: the structure of international security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 26, 48.

Despite leaders emphasising that China and Africa have a long history of alliances and cooperation, the reality of China's historical role varies from region-to-region. Beijing played a notable role in Africa's post-independence state formation processes, by supporting liberation groups and sub-state actors in the 1960s and 70s that tried to create pro-China regimes in the newly formed states. In Central and West Africa this proved mostly disastrous. Blatant breaches of non-interference occurred through training of dissidents, and foolhardy meddling in places like Zaire, currently known as The Democratic Republic of the Congo, led to resentment and outspoken criticism from various independence leaders. China's public support for Biafra rebels in Nigeria also caused difficulties.<sup>28</sup>

In Southern Africa, Chinese support for independence and anti-apartheid struggles was much more welcome, until the Sino-Soviet split then caused intense embarrassment: China supported the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) in the Angolan Civil War (due to USSR backing the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)) who were also aided by racist South Africa during a 1975 offensive. This exposed China's interference as entirely self-interested. Meanwhile, however, they successfully supported the victorious Mugabe in Zimbabwe, which is quite a rare example of a genuinely prolonged historical allegiance aligning with modern day relations.<sup>29</sup> In the Horn, cordial relations were largely maintained despite the intense instability and Soviet interests in Ethiopia. North Africa's relative wealth made it far harder to penetrate: China saw Egypt as a key diplomatic partner, for example, but this did not prevent Nasser publicly criticising China over their actions in Tibet.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Shaping regional hegemony?***

With Chinese engagement being more broken than is now openly referenced by current leaders, Africa's regional and regionalisation processes took shape and developed their own geo-political dynamics largely independent of China (although, yes, China was always present). The modern post-2000 Chinese surge into Africa, therefore, has played into and adapted to the unique conditions found in each region. Regional geo-politics is affected by regionalisation processes that may help or hinder the development of more formal regional cooperation, as economic and military power becomes centred on particular states or challenged by regional rivals.

The Nigerian hegemon in West Africa is the nodal state around which security dynamics unfurl. China's incursions have been problematic and contested, but they have ultimately made significant inroads with frenetic and varied activity.<sup>31</sup> Nigerian regional hegemony is so insurmountable that this Chinese role cements existing regional security dynamics, despite scrambles for oil in places like Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire and Senegal potentially influencing the relative importance of lesser rivals.<sup>32</sup>

South Africa, however, which enjoys strong ties with China, sees its substantial regional power and wealth more challenged than is sometimes assumed.<sup>33</sup> Despite the historic

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<sup>28</sup> Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, pp. 284-322.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *China and Africa*, pp. 75-115; Abiodun Alao, 'China and Zimbabwe: The context and contents of a complex relationship', *SAIIA Occasional Paper* 202 (2014).

<sup>30</sup> Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, pp. 228-283.

<sup>31</sup> A US\$8.3 billion railway project granted under Obasanjo was cancelled by parliament in 2009, and a former Central Bank governor wrote a scathing denunciation of China's presence in 2013, for example.

<sup>32</sup> Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, pp. 287-298; Samuel Amanor, 'Chinese money for Ghana's natural resources: The real cost', *Consultancy Africa Intelligence*, Working Paper, August 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Chris Alden and Maxi Schoeman, 'South Africa's symbolic hegemony in Africa', *International Politics* 52(2), (2015), pp. 239-254.



difficulties, shared interests post-2000 sees Angola as the lynch-pin of Beijing's Africa strategy: the so-called 'Angola Model' of oil exports exchanged for Chinese-funded infrastructure projects has become synonymous with Sino-Africa relations. Luanda-Pretoria dynamics have been altered by China's presence. Angola's diamonds, oil, and strong army, with investment from China and elsewhere, means that Angola's 'potential as a regional power is clear... (it) could become a future rival to South Africa in Southern Africa.'<sup>34</sup>

North Africa sees less Chinese influence due to its more balanced portfolio of investors (and a rather dominant US in the Egyptian hegemon and elsewhere),<sup>35</sup> however in the Horn there is even clearer involvement of China in the geo-political dynamics. Chinese investment in Sudan during its prolonged international pariah status has helped maintain its strong regional economic and military influence. Along with major oil purchases China constructed an arms plant which made Sudan a leading military equipment manufacturer in Africa, whilst the security environment encountered there had a serious impact on China National Petroleum Corporation's (CNPC) subsequent global strategy.<sup>36</sup> Ethiopia, Sudan's major regional protagonist, saw Chinese activity as economically critical from the mid-2000s onwards. Both Ethiopia and Sudan's ambitious Dam Programmes have heavy Chinese investment, and pit the foes in direct competition over who garners more regional influence in the energy sector.<sup>37</sup>

China, therefore, feeds into African regional geo-politics and high-level regionalisation processes by (to some extent) shifting and shaping where economic and military power is held in each region. But the nature of China's role and influence is varied in each place. The multifaceted nature of regionalisation means that this higher-level influence is not the only area where dynamics shift and where China plays a role.

### ***Localised issues***

Local-level security issues also show worthy continental comparisons, but always with important regional nuances and intrigues. Regionalisation in Africa is greatly affected by the local security challenges that citizens and states encounter, and there are marked regional differences as to which are most prominent and China's role therein.

Here, North Africa stands out for offering a peculiar mix of Jihadi threat and intense political instability. The Arab Spring has proven problematic but China has weathered it rather well. Beijing publicly respected the choice of the Egyptian people,<sup>38</sup> and impressively evacuated

<sup>34</sup> Adekeye Adebajo, 'South Africa and Angola: Southern Africa's Pragmatic Hegemons', *Regional Integration Observer* 6(1), (2012), <http://www.ccr.org.za/index.php/media-release/in-the-media/newspaper-articles/item/181-south-africa-and-angola-southern-africas-pragmatic-hegemons> (accessed 23 May 2016)

<sup>35</sup> Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, pp. 235-238; Eugenia Pecoraro, 'China's strategy in North Africa and future economic challenges for the Mediterranean region', *EUGOV Working Paper*, 25, November 2010, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> David Shinn, 'Chinese Involvement in African Conflict Zones', *China Brief* 9(77), (2009), p. 8; Robyn Meredith, *The Elephant and the Dragon: The Rise of India and China and What It Means for Us All* (New York: Norton, 2008), p. 166; Luke Patey, 'Learning in Africa: China's Overseas Oil Investments in Sudan and South Sudan', *Journal of Contemporary China* 26(107), (2017), pp.756-768.

<sup>37</sup> Mebratu Seyoum and Jihong Lin, 'Private Chinese Investment in Ethiopia: Determinants and Location Decisions', *Journal of International Development* 27(7) (2015), pp. 1223-1242; Harry Verhoeven, 'Black Gold for Blue Gold? Sudan's Oil, Ethiopia's Water and Regional Integration', *Chatham House Africa Programme*, AFP BP 2011/03, June 2011.

<sup>38</sup> 'Egypt enters into initial deal for 15 projects worth \$10 bln with China – minister', *Reuters*, 15 June 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-investment-china/egypt-enters-into-initial-deal-for-15-projects-worth-10-bln-with-china-minister-idUSL5N0Z14NG20150615> (accessed 22 May 2017); Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, pp.229-232.

35,000 Chinese citizens from Libya.<sup>39</sup> Algeria based Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has threatened to target Chinese workers across North Africa and killed twenty-four Algerian paramilitary police escorting Chinese in 2009.<sup>40</sup> Similar issues have occurred in West Africa where Boko Haram have attacked and kidnapped Chinese workers, but less so elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> West Africa has also seen China (rather impressively) retain its non-interference principle during coups in Guinea (2008), Mauritania (2008) and Niger (2010),<sup>42</sup> as well as making inroads into Cote D'Ivoire after the 2002 Civil War and again after the 2010-11 election crisis.<sup>43</sup>

Partly as a hangover from its liberation era support and meddling, and partly due to its continued engagement with dubious government networks (most notably in Sudan), Chinese made Small Arms and Slight Weapons (SALW) are a key feature in countless local level security issues across Africa but particularly in the Horn and Central regions. China North Industries Group Corp (NORINCO) was criticised for shipping arms to Juba during the early stages of the South Sudan Machar-Kiir conflict in 2015.<sup>44</sup> Southern African workers also refused to unload a Chinese arms shipment in 2008, due to them likely being used in a Zimbabwean post-election crackdown.<sup>45</sup> China's involvement in the Gulf of Aden anti-piracy efforts are entirely unique to the Horn, as is the recent construction of the Chinese Naval Base in Djibouti.<sup>46</sup> Despite the publicity and interest, however, this piracy issue is more a global trade problem rather than a specific African challenge. More significant and impressive in a region riddled with inter-state tensions is the \$3.4 billion Chinese built electric 755 km railway linking Djibouti and Ethiopia, which opened in October 2016.<sup>47</sup>

So, despite the non-interference principle, China does feed into the more localised regionalisation process and regional security challenges which African states and people confront. In the African context, where national institutions and state structures are more contested than elsewhere, these local issues can prove particularly problematic and influential in shaping regional dynamics as they become difficult to control and direct. Lack of institutional frameworks, however, also increase the influence of respective leaders who are less constrained than those operating in more formalised settings.

### ***The importance of African Leaders***

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<sup>39</sup> Chris Alden, *Seeking Security In Africa*.

<sup>40</sup> Hugo Brennan, 'North Africa: Are the Chinese Next On Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's Hit List?', *AllAfrica.com*, 17 December 2013, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201312181196.html> (accessed 22 May 2017); 'Algerian gas plant siege: Military's role questioned', *BBC News*, 12 September 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24064143> (accessed 10 December 2016).

<sup>41</sup> 'Cameroon flies freed Boko Haram hostages to capital', *BBC News*, 11 October 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-29581495> (accessed 10 December 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Holslag, 'China's Vulnerability Trap', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 52(2), (2011), pp. 77-88.

<sup>43</sup> Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, pp.317-319.

<sup>44</sup> 'China Halts Arms Sales to South Sudan After Norinco Shipment', *Bloomberg*, 30 September 2014, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-09-29/china-halts-weapons-sales-to-south-sudan-after-norinco-shipment> (accessed 23 February 2019); 'UN: China arms firm sold \$20M in weapons to South Sudan', *Washington Times*, 25 August 2015, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/aug/25/un-china-arms-firm-sold-20m-in-weapons-to-south-su/> (accessed 23 February 2019).

<sup>45</sup> Marcus Power, Giles Mohan and May Tan-Mullins, *China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 247-8.

<sup>46</sup> 'Chinese military base takes shape in Djibouti', *The Financial Times* (12 July 2017), <https://www.ft.com/content/bc8a2820-66e1-11e7-8526-7b38dcaef614> (accessed 15 May 2018).

<sup>47</sup> 'Ethiopia-Djibouti electric railway line opens', *BBC News*, 5 October 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-37562177> (accessed 15 May 2018).

African leaders are vitally important to these geo-political and more localised dynamics. The complexity of issues does not mean they can simplistically control and direct all regionalisation processes, but they retain crucial roles in determining the impacts and influence of Beijing in their respective regional contexts. Khartoum-Addis rivalry has seen pivotal roles for Omar Bashir in ensuring his regime's survival by courting Chinese investment, just as Meles Zenawi's ability to resist Western influence and launch an African-born development state model had China as a crucial player. China apparently applied behind-the-scenes pressure on Bashir to halt Darfur killings in 2007, and supported sanctions against both leaders in the 2015 South Sudanese Machar-Kiir Conflict.<sup>48</sup>

Southern African rivalry also has clear leadership components. Mandela maintained diplomatic ties with Taipei for several years post-Apartheid despite their previous support for the racist Pretoria regime. This was probably due to China's backing of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the main rival to Mandela's African National Congress (ANC), during the anti-apartheid struggle. He officially switched South Africa to recognising Beijing in 1998, however.<sup>49</sup> South Africa's Mbeki and Angola's dos Santos had frosty relations, but Zuma's subsequent courting of Angola was in no small part due to China and other BRICS' investments in Angola offering opportunities to South Africa.<sup>50</sup> And despite a deteriorating economy, Zimbabwe is still central to regional security and China was an essential ally to Mugabe, becoming his main arms supplier following embargoes.<sup>51</sup> At the time of writing, any role China played in facilitating the coup in Zimbabwe that removed Mugabe in November 2017 remains entirely speculative.<sup>52</sup> The Chinese ambassador's threat to leave Zambia if Sata won the 2006 election whilst running on an anti-Chinese ticket also garnered much attention (but did not prevent continual expanding relations following Sata's eventual 2011 election victory).<sup>53</sup>

In Central Africa, both Laurent and Joseph Kabila received military training in China,<sup>54</sup> and Joseph's 2007 state of the union address angered Western ambassadors by praising China for rescuing the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).<sup>55</sup> Deby in Chad has avoided US pressure by engaging China whilst also suspending CNPC operations over an oil spill.<sup>56</sup> Paul Biya's Cameroon, where China also has more significant oil interests, was apparently buying Chinese website-filter technology amid 2017 public protests in order to avoid less subtle

<sup>48</sup> Power, Mohan and Tan-Mullins, *China's Resource Diplomacy*, p. 188; Gorm Olsen, 'Great power intervention in African armed conflicts', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 28(2), (2015), pp. 229-245

<sup>49</sup> Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, p. 346.

<sup>50</sup> Adekeye Adebajo, *South Africa and Angola*; Marjus Weimer, 'Jacob Zuma visits Angola: a Watershed for Southern Africa?', *Chatham House Expert Comment*, 18 August 2009, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/media/comment/view/163767> (accessed 12 March 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Pádraig Carmody, *Globalization in Africa: Recolonization or Renaissance?* (Colorado: Lynne Reiner Publishers, Inc., 2010), p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> 'Zimbabwe: was Mugabe's fall a result of China flexing its muscle?', *The Guardian*, 17 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/17/zimbabwe-was-mugabes-fall-a-result-of-china-flexing-its-muscle> (accessed 20 November 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Nicole Beardsworth, 'Zambia elections: the Lungu succession and rise of the UPND', *African Arguments*, 29 January 2015, <https://africanarguments.org/2015/01/29/zambia-elections-the-lungu-succession-and-rise-of-the-upnd-by-nicole-beardsworth/> (accessed 23 February 2019).

<sup>54</sup> Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, p.292.

<sup>55</sup> Wikileaks cable 07KINSHASA1344, PRESIDENT KABILA DELIVERS UPBEAT "STATE OF THE NATION" ADDRESS, Democratic Republic of the Congo Kinshasa, December 7<sup>th</sup> 2007, <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/12/07KINSHASA1344.html> (accessed 4 March 2015).

<sup>56</sup> 'Chad suspends China firm CNPC over oil spill', *BBC News*, 14 August 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23697269> (accessed 20 December 2015); Didier Djoumessi, *The Political Impacts of the Sino-US Oil Competition in Africa* (London: Adonis & Abbey, 2009), pp. 187-224.

internet blackouts. During this time Biya was also formally invited to meet Xi Jinping in China to further cement ties.<sup>57</sup> Libya's Gadhafi stood out in the North: his relations with Taiwan always complicated relations with Beijing; he publicly warned against a new era of Chinese imperialism in 2000; and then apparently visited arms companies in China whilst a UN backed embargo was in place (to Beijing's embarrassment and denials). The regional fall-out from Gadhafi's downfall also indirectly led to China sending a UN peacekeeping 'guard team' to Mali during the 2013 crisis.<sup>58</sup>

African leaders play a unique role in shaping the nature of Chinese engagement and regionalisation processes underway. Their different personalities, backgrounds and abilities have significant impact on their regional context and China's respective role. They also, of course, have been key in initiating formal regionalism structures, at both the AU where formal regional frameworks are established and then in implementing them (or not) in their respective region.

### ***Formal regionalism***

China has a unique relationship with the AU's REC 'building blocks', the continent's formal regionalist institutions. Chinese interest seems to be tied entirely to the functionality and importance of the respective RECs. It is yet to take on any serious security component. The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) is an important regional actor and plays a notable role in fairly well-structured Chinese relations. There were regular meetings and increasingly institutionalised cooperation throughout the 2000s.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, the regional importance of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sees relatively advanced relations: an China-ECOWAS Business Forum resulted in numerous Memorandum of Understanding's (MoU) between ECOWAS and Chinese companies or municipal governments.<sup>60</sup>

The Horn's Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) is ambitious but has ultimately limited importance, which has been mirrored by China's own engagement. China agreed an MoU providing \$100,000 for IGAD's operational costs in 2011,<sup>61</sup> and then experimented with a 'mediator-like' role between sides during the 2013 South Sudan violence. Beijing quickly reverted to supporting IGAD's own forlorn efforts, however, once

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<sup>57</sup> 'Political tensions are growing in Cameroon's troubled English-speaking regions', *Quartz-Africa*, 20 March 2017, <https://qz.com/africa/936788/camerouns-anglophone-protestors-are-facing-a-government-crackdown/> (accessed 2 January 2018); Dionne Searcey and Francois Essomba, 'African Nations Increasingly Silence Internet to Stem Protests', *New York Times*, 2 February 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/10/world/africa/african-nations-increasingly-silence-internet-to-stem-protests.html> (accessed 20 March 2017).

<sup>58</sup> 'Chinese peacekeepers arrive in Mali in historic deployment', *Defence Web*, 11 December 2013, [https://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=33029:chinese-peacekeepers-arrive-in-mali-in-historic-deployment&catid=56:Diplomacy%20&%20Peace&Itemid=111](https://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33029:chinese-peacekeepers-arrive-in-mali-in-historic-deployment&catid=56:Diplomacy%20&%20Peace&Itemid=111) (accessed 4 February 2014); 'China's 'Combat Troops' in Africa', *Foreign Policy*, 15 July 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/07/15/chinas-combat-troops-in-africa/> (accessed 20 August 2017).

<sup>59</sup> Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, pp. 124-125; 'Southern Africa region presents huge opportunities for China-Africa industrial cooperation', *Xinhua*, 3 May 2015, [http://english.gov.cn/policies/policy\\_watch/2015/07/06/content\\_281475141569718.htm](http://english.gov.cn/policies/policy_watch/2015/07/06/content_281475141569718.htm) (accessed 3 April 2018).

<sup>60</sup> 'ECOWAS Urges Timely Delivery Of Abidjan-Lagos Highway Project', *ECOWAS Press Release* N°: 036/2014, 3 March 2014; Funmi Olonisakin, 'BRICS and African International Organisations', unpublished paper submitted to *SAIIA*, 2012, pp. 125-127.

<sup>61</sup> Abiodun Alao and Chris Alden, 'African's Security Challenges and China's Evolving Approach to Africa's Peace and Security Architecture', in *China and Africa: Building Peace and Security Cooperation on the Continent*, ed. Chris Alden et al. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).



realising the complexity of the situation.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, the dysfunctionality and unimportance of Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) means China shows no serious interest beyond lip-service, such as stating a willingness to work with it to help resolve the 2013 Central African Republic.<sup>63</sup> In North Africa, China set up its own China-Arab States Cooperation Forum for all 22 Arab League members, rather than engaging the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA).<sup>64</sup>

China, therefore, seems interested in and willing to engage with African regionalism to some extent. Formal regional organisations are seen as useful avenues for cooperation and influence, increasingly in relation to security issues. But the nature of that engagement is inconsistent, as China apparently interacts with Africa's RO's on their own terms and when it is in their interests. Their preference for state-to-state engagement has not yet been superseded by a fully regional approach.

The continental picture above of interwoven geopolitical rivalries, local security issues and varying importance of particular leaders highlights a role for China in African security dynamics that varies across regions. Africa's complexity is exemplified by its simultaneous regional- and state- building efforts. Formal regional architecture is being created that is often playing 'catch-up' with the regionalisation processes already underway. Meanwhile, empirical state sovereignty is still being pursued amongst regional rivalries, despite the planned regional structures ultimately requiring a ceding of state authority to some extent. This regional perspective ensures an Africa-centric starting point for analysis, whilst emphasising the non-linear transfer of impacts and influences between Africa and China. This is not a one-way process of influence directed by Beijing. China feeds into dynamics by engaging the formal regional structures to some extent, whilst also (somewhat unwittingly) being used by regional actors for their own geopolitical purposes or being drawn into local security issues. To date, China's role is felt far more within informal regionalisation processes which include a variety of state and non-state actors, rather than relationships with any institutionalised regional structures.

### **Structural and local impacts in East Africa**

The above regional portrait is admittedly broad and somewhat simplistic. Its purpose is to highlight the regional differences and similarities in the security issues encountered by China and their resultant role in (potentially) shaping dynamics. A more focused analysis of the East African context below outlines the nuances and uniqueness of the region in greater detail. Again, regional geo-politics, unique local level security issues, and particular leaders play an important role in determining Chinese impacts, alongside noteworthy relations with the East African Community (EAC) regional body.

#### ***East Africa within the China-Africa story***

Greater East Africa relations are central to the espoused narrative arc that China-Africa relations enjoy a history of trade rather than conquest. Admiral Zheng He's famous peaceful voyages to Africa from 1418-33 sailed to modern day Somalia and Kenya. The Tanzania-

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<sup>62</sup> Professor Daniel Large, China-Sudan/South Sudan expert, speaking at FOCAC VI side-event on China-Africa's maturing relationship, December 2015; see also 'Igad to involve new players in South Sudan peace talks', *East African*, 14 March 2015, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Igad-asks-more-countries-to-join-South-Sudan-peace-talks/-/2558/2653010/-/50917t/-/index.html> (accessed 22 April 2016).

<sup>63</sup> 'Central African Republic: China Hopes Central African Republic Will Have New Leaders Soon', *allafrica.com*, 13 January 2014, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201401140374.html> (accessed 24 March 2014).

<sup>64</sup> 'Wang Yi: Sixth Ministerial Meeting of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum Will Yield Important Fruits', *FOCAC News*, 4 June 2014, <http://iq.chineseembassy.org/eng/zygx/t1164659.htm> (accessed 8 April 2015).

Zambia TAZARA railway is championed as a beacon of prolonged China-Africa friendship. Tanzania also played a pivotal role in gaining African votes for Beijing's famous 1971 ascension to the UN Security Council.<sup>65</sup>

During that same post-independence period, fluctuating national rivalries and mistrust amongst leaders were a hallmark of regional security dynamics in East Africa and led to the collapse of the original EAC I (1967-1977).<sup>66</sup> A rejuvenated EAC arrangement, however, was formerly relaunched in 2001 comprising Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. Formal EAC regionalist expansion has always played catch-up with the regional security dynamics and regionalisation processes compelling integration: Rwanda and Burundi's inclusion in 2007 was at least partly done to help stabilise them after their respective Civil Wars; and cross-border trade with South Sudan made their 2016 inclusion somewhat inevitable.<sup>67</sup> Inter-regional tensions and personal animosity between leaders have nonetheless remained present. Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya formed the 'Coalition of the Willing' (CoW) in 2013, for example, after Tanzania (and Burundi) became hesitant over a proposal to push forward with political federation.<sup>68</sup> Individual state building processes remain complex and incomplete even as EAC attempts to forge its own regional security function. Within this unstable fluctuating regional dynamic, China's re-emergence as a global power with a capacity for mega-construction aligns them with the already progressing EAC architecture.

Increased Chinese investment is evident in each EAC member country, to varying extents, and a November 2011 China-EAC Framework Agreement was the first of its kind between China and an African REC (it has infrastructure construction as a key feature).<sup>69</sup> Chinese arms are supplied to differing degrees to all countries and have been noticeably present in all serious regional conflicts since independence, which have been some of the most brutal and bloody in Africa (and the world).<sup>70</sup>

### ***Oil and rivalry emerges***

Oil is the most serious geopolitical issue of the moment in East Africa. The region has all the ingredients required for oil-related conflict: nefarious foreign interests, poor domestic governance structures and dangerously high local expectations are all present.<sup>71</sup> Oil has been found in the areas historically most marginalised and neglected by central government,

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Yamashita, *Zheng He* (Verelli: White Star, 2006), p. 50-51; Nga Kamata, 'Perspectives on Sino-Tanzanian Relations' in Seifudein Adem, ed, *China's Diplomacy in Eastern and Southern Africa* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 87-106.

<sup>66</sup> Barney Walsh, 'Human Security in East Africa: The EAC'S Illusive Quest for Inclusive Citizenship', *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 37(1), (2015), pp. 77-79.

<sup>67</sup> 'South Sudan admitted into EAC', *Daily Nation*, 2 March 2016, <https://www.nation.co.ke/business/South-Sudan-admitted-into-EAC/996-3100314-acaobi/index.html> (accessed 20 March 2016).

<sup>68</sup> Walsh, *Human Security in East Africa*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>69</sup> 'Big Brother China pumps \$11b into East Africa', *The East African*, 4 May 2013, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Big-Brother-China-pumps-USD11b-into-East-Africa/2560-1841804-gtc5tkz/index.html> (accessed 10 February 2016); interview with EALA Representatives, January 2015.

<sup>70</sup> 'Kenya boosts China ties with Sh7.9bn arms purchase deal', *Business Daily Africa*, 15 February 2016, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/news/Kenya-boosts-China-ties-with-Sh7-9bn-arms-purchase-deal/539546-3076738-vbegfnz/index.html> (accessed 06 February 2019); 'China makes big inroads into African defence market', *Defence Web*, 26 January 2016, <https://www.defencweb.co.za/industry/industry-industry/china-makes-big-inroads-into-african-defence-market/?catid=7%3AIndustry&Itemid=116> (accessed 30 March 2016).

<sup>71</sup> Abiodun Alao, *Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa: The Tragedy of Endowment* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), pp. 157-206.



meaning existing tensions have become amplified. Only Burundi has not had direct oil-linked violence of some kind, although exploration activities there have been relatively minimal.<sup>72</sup>

The East African oil sector is therefore a major regional security issue, and China plays a key role within it. Uganda's proposed oil refinery and crude export pipeline to the Indian Ocean are key development issues for the whole of EAC. China National Offshore Oil Corporation's (CNOOC) has a 33% stake in Uganda's oil find, although companies from UK, Norway and France have more concessions in the region. China is clearly seen as a major market for future oil sales, however, and is heavily involved in the vitally important geo-strategic infrastructure projects that the sector will directly rely upon, as well as those that are to be funded through anticipated revenues. The Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), a new rail line originally proposed to connect Mombasa-Kampala-Kigali with plans also to link to Juba, has an estimated eventual cost of \$11 Billion. China is positioned as a major financier (the \$3.8 billion Mombasa-Nairobi link opened in June 2017).<sup>73</sup> Despite warnings from authors such as Brautigam that it is simplistic to assume China's oil-for-infrastructure deals are as prevalent throughout Africa as is sometimes assumed,<sup>74</sup> in East Africa they do appear either explicitly or implicitly. Infrastructure became top of the entire EAC development agenda following a 2008 fact-finding mission to China by ministers, and is linked directly to new oil finds appearing and China's willingness to finance projects.<sup>75</sup>

These mega-projects provide integration and development benefits as well as potentially problematic schisms within a vulnerable region. Kenya's aggressive push on SGR and wider infrastructure agenda, for example, was at least partly to counter the threat to Mombasa port posed by Tanzania's proposed Chinese-funded Bagamoyo mega-port. The CoW effort, which had SGR as its flagship project, was intended to show Tanzania how quickly progress could be made whether they were involved or not.<sup>76</sup> Three years of media-hype and controversy over CoW created a perception that EAC could even potentially split, with public spats and clear inter-personal tension between leaders very evident. Military conflagration was not ruled out, during interviews with certain politicians.<sup>77</sup> Eventually, in 2015 Tanzania

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<sup>72</sup> 'Kenya Army Deployed after Kapedo Clashes', *AllAfrica.com*, 11 November 2014, <https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00033620.html> (accessed 6 February 2019); 'Zanzibar and Tanzania vie over oil reserves', *Financial Times*, 10 March 2015, <https://www.ft.com/content/a9c40430-0cf5-398b-bd61-9039cfb6b4f4> (accessed 20 July 2016); 'DR Congo: 'FDLR rebels kidnap' Soco oil worker', *BBC News*, 15 February 2015, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12475582> (accessed 20 July 2016); 'Bunyoro Kingdom in bloody land clashes', *Oil in Uganda*, 8 December 2014, <http://www.oilinuganda.org/features/land/bunyoro-kingdom-in-bloody-land-clashes.html> (accessed 20 July 2016); 'Oil exploration to 'begin soon' in Lake Tanganyika', *The Citizen*, 9 June 2017, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/News/Oil-exploration-to--begin-soon--in-Lake-Tanganyika/1840340-3962760-14tdnlaz/index.html> (accessed 20 July 2016).

<sup>73</sup> Risdel Kasasira and Frederic Musisi, 'Railway scandal: How the project slipped off', *Daily Monitor*, 31 August 2014, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/Magazines/PeoplePower/Railway-scandal--How-the-project-slipped-off/689844-2435504-2942npz/index.html> (accessed 15 July 2015); 'Lessons from Kenya's New, Chinese-funded Railway', *Chatham House Expert Commentary*, 20 June 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/lessons-kenya-s-new-chinese-funded-railway> (accessed 17 August 2018).

<sup>74</sup> Deborah Brautigam, '5 Myths About Chinese Investment in Africa', *Foreign Policy*, 4 December 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/04/5-myths-about-chinese-investment-in-africa/> (accessed 23 February 2019).

<sup>75</sup> 'EAC Ministers in China for Infrastructure Development Study Tour', *Uganda Radio Network*, 8 May 2008, <https://ugandaradionetwork.com/story/eac-ministers-in-china-for-infrastructure-development-study-tour> (accessed 2 December 2014); 1st Retreat of the Heads of States of the EAC, June 2008; Interview with Director of Infrastructure at the EAC Secretariat, January 2015.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with government advisor and EAC integration expert, September 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with various regional security specialists and politicians, July-August 2014.

announced its own \$14 billion railway network project linking Dar es Salaam with DRC, Rwanda and Burundi, after a funding agreement was agreed with China (although subsequently, Turkish firms have been competing with China to construct the different sections of track).<sup>78</sup> The furore around CoW has subsequently diminished, but only once a more re-engaged Tanzanian leadership began re-asserting its regional position by utilising the presence and willingness of China to help fund projects.

### ***Terror and Guns: global issues with local impacts***

Alongside these serious geo-political, structural security issues related to the oil sector and mega-infrastructure construction, terrorism is East Africa's most prominent local-level security concern. The region has seen some of the most notorious terrorist atrocities in the developing world: the 1998 Al-Qaeda US Embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya; spectacular Al-Shabaab attacks at Westgate mall (2013) and Garissa University (2015) killing 67 and 147 respectively in Kenya; and the 2010 Al-Shabaab bomb attack in Kampala, Uganda killing 74 people. Burundi has also seen credible public threats from Al-Shabaab and Rwanda is a possible source of operatives and affiliates.<sup>79</sup>

China plays a role in the terrorism issue through the global ivory trade and SALW proliferation. China is not the only market for ivory, but there is no doubt that the current East African poaching epidemic is linked to the influx of Chinese. Ivory has long been a source of income for rebel groups such as Uganda's barbarous and universally condemned Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and Somalia's Al-Shabaab garner significant income from the trade. SALW proliferation is an enabling factor in ivory poaching, as well as in the wider terrorist menace and structural instability in East Africa. Chinese arms have a long history of circulating in the region, from the liberation-era struggles through to Beijing's special relationship with Sudan and into the modern era.<sup>80</sup> A representative from Uganda's National Focal Point on SALW noted in interview: 'Chinese made arms are the main arms in the region, the main ones. If you have been to Tanzania, the AK-47s they have are Chinese versions. All along here. You go to DRC, South Sudan, that is it.'<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Walsh, *Human Security in East Africa*, p. 93; 'Turkey wins bid to finance, build \$1.9b second phase of Tanzania railway', *The East African*, 16 October 2017, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Turkey-wins-bid-to-finance--1-9b-Tanzania-SGR/2560-4141376-u2ru0yz/index.html> (accessed 4 February 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Darlington Mutanda, 'What Makes Terrorism Tick in Africa? Evidence from Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram', *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 21(1), (2017), pp. 20-40; 'Security crisis engulfing entire East African region', *The East African*, Editorial, 12 July 2014, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/oped/editorial/Security-crisis-engulfing-entire-East-African-region-/434752-2381264-c0ax0dz/index.html> (accessed 1 August 2015); 'US warns against Burundi travel amid Al Shabaab threat', *The East African*, 31 October 2014, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/US-warns-against-Burundi-travel-amid-Al-Shabaab-threat/2558-2506020-format-sitemap-14s2kn7/index.html> (accessed 1 August 2015); 'Kenya: Rwandan Al Shabaab Man Surrenders', *AllAfrica*, 11 June 2014, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201406110857.html> (accessed 1 August 2015).

<sup>80</sup> Interviews with EALA representatives and EAC Peace and Security Experts, January 2015; Interviews with UPDF Officers, September 2014; see also Vidhi Doshi, 'How Africa's 'white gold' funds the al-Shabaab militants', *The Independent*, 3 February 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/campaigns/elephant-campaign/elephant-campaign-how-africa-s-white-gold-funds-the-al-shabaab-militants-9102862.html> (accessed 10 November 2015); Kara Moses, 'Lord's Resistance Army funded by elephant poaching, report finds', *The Guardian*, 4 June 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jun/04/lords-resistance-army-funded-elephant-poaching> (accessed 10 November 2015); Report of the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, S/2011/433, 18 July 2011, pp. 231-234, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full\\_Report\\_1869.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Report_1869.pdf) (accessed 10 November 2015).

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Ugandan National Focal Point representative, September 2014.

China is aware of its own role in the ivory trade and the resultant public criticism it receives, to which it is extremely sensitive. Beijing has enacted certain measures under degrees of pressure from East African governments and a global anti-poaching campaign, culminating in its domestic ban on ivory trading and processing by the end of 2017.<sup>82</sup> China's role in SALW, however, is more problematic for Beijing to seriously acknowledge or tackle. China has participated in Saferworld organised Africa-China-EU dialogues around such issues, but consistently argues it is the responsibility of recipient governments to stop SALW falling into nefarious hands. China is yet to sign or ratify the UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), and have not actively helped EAC's anti-SALW efforts.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Regional leaders and Museveni's games***

This context helps enable East African states to behave in certain ways. China's (lack of) role and effort in particular areas provides space to pursue militarised, non-holistic responses to security challenges where governments can shift blame or court attention depending on their specific interests. East African leaders often ask the US and EU to supply high-tech responses to ivory poaching such as drones, automatic weapons and Special Forces deployment.<sup>84</sup> This has helped create an arms race between poachers and anti-poaching units across the region. Various national armies have been implicated in human rights abuses, killing of protected animals, and cover-ups and collusions over poaching under the pretext of combatting the issue.<sup>85</sup> The emerging EAC security apparatus remains very military-centric. Despite EACs perceived economic aims and espoused people-centred approach, a more traditional long-standing arms race is also occurring between member states. Notably, this arms race has been further encouraged by Chinese arming of the Islamist Sudanese government in Khartoum, which Uganda in particular felt obliged to react to.<sup>86</sup>

Of the regional leaders that China has encountered within these regionalisation processes, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda has proven particularly adept at manipulating the Chinese role to suit his regional agenda and shape regional security dynamics. Museveni has always pushed more forcefully for EAC political union than any other leader and has played a unique role in each member states political economy. Museveni has meddled in Kenyan domestic politics, he has a long personal, problematic relationship with Rwanda's President Kagame, and chaired the Regional Initiative for Burundi which helped end the 1993-2005 civil war. Tanzanian hesitancy over political federation stems, at least in part, from suspicion over Museveni's role in pushing it, yet he was able to help diffuse public tensions between Rwanda's Kagame and Tanzania's Kikwete during the CoW spats.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with EAC Conflict Early Warning expert, January 2015; Karl Mathiesen, 'Alone, China's ban on ivory could make life worse for elephants', *The Guardian*, 6 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jan/06/china-ban-ivory-life-worse-elephants-poaching> (accessed 10 January 2017).

<sup>83</sup> Interview with EAC Peace and Security Expert, January 2015; Interview with senior member of EAC Secretariat, January 2015; see also 'Beijing meeting on African peace and security: combating illicit small arms and ammunition', *Saferworld*, Seminar Report, Beijing, 18 March 2014, p. 2-3; Arms Trade Treaty, UN, New York, 2 April 2013, [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg\\_no=XXVI-8&chapter=26&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVI-8&chapter=26&clang=en) (accessed 5 February 2019)

<sup>84</sup> Andres Crosta, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Elephant Action League, speaking at FOCAC VI side-event on Wildlife conservation, 2 December 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Matthew Bolton, 'Using the Arms Trade Treaty to Address Wildlife Poaching in East Africa: A Human Security Approach', *ControlArms.org*, Working Paper, Version 5.2, November 2015, pp. 6-7.

<sup>86</sup> 'East African Countries Rise Defense Budgets On Increased Terrorism Threats', *AFK Insider*, 16 April 2014; Interview with Brigadier in the Ugandan People's Defence Force, August 2014.

<sup>87</sup> Various interviews conducted in Uganda and East Africa, including Uganda Ministry of Finance spokesperson, and EAC Conflict Early Warning experts, July 2014-January 2015; see also Richard Dowden,

China's role has somewhat aided Uganda's regional anti-terrorist role by, indirectly, helping to fund and arm the threats that Museveni reacts against. He has also proven adept at engaging the West when it suits him and resisting them when it does not. Post-9/11, President Museveni manoeuvred himself to become an indispensable part of US security strategy in Africa. He inserted long-standing domestic security challenges such as the LRA (largely armed by Khartoum) into the new US Global War on Terror discourse, and then initiated the Uganda-led AMISOM mission in Somalia against Al-Shabaab.<sup>88</sup> Uganda is known for asking both the West and Chinese for long lists of unnecessarily expensive military equipment apparently needed to tackle particular issues, whilst also being uncooperative on particular matters. They resisted a Saferworld study group from visiting Uganda's domestic arms manufacturing plant (originally built with aid from China's Wanbao Engineering Corporation), for example.<sup>89</sup> Museveni has also shown no particular interest in halting Uganda's role in the ivory trade as a source, consolidation hub and major transport route.<sup>90</sup>

The oil sector and related Chinese presence has also been played well by Museveni. He deliberately brought CNOOC into Uganda in a geo-political move against American companies. He has personally intervened to decide on contractor rights amongst rival Chinese companies on projects such as the Karuma Dam, amongst others, but also prevented over-reliance on China by dropping a Chinese consortium's bid to build Uganda's \$4 billion oil refinery.<sup>91</sup> He has played regional geo-politics within regional infrastructure drives more than any other leader. Museveni pushed into Kenya's wildly ambitious Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) infrastructure project by making Uganda's oil find officially part of the plan, and then utilised the CoW's Chinese funded projects to make Kenya's President Kenyatta focus more on EAC's Northern Corridor (LAPSSET would tie Kenya more to Sudan and Ethiopia). Museveni later angered his supposed CoW allies by altering the agreed Kampala SGR links from Kigali to Juba, and Uganda's oil pipeline end point from Kenya to Tanzania.<sup>92</sup>

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'Reconciliation for Kagame and Museveni', *Huffington Post*, 2 September 2011, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/richard-dowden/reconciliation-for-kagame\\_b\\_943271.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/richard-dowden/reconciliation-for-kagame_b_943271.html) (accessed 18 January 2015).

<sup>88</sup> Jonathan Fisher, 'Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualising Uganda's 2007 Intervention in Somalia', *African Affairs* 111(444), (2012), pp. 404–423; Frank van Acker, 'Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: The New Order No One Ordered', *African Affairs* 103(412), (2004), pp. 335–357.

<sup>89</sup> Interviews with former Minister from early Museveni cabinets, July–August 2014; Interview with Ugandan National Focal Point representative, September 2014; Interview with Expert with expert on China's role in SALW proliferation, May 2015; see also 'Uganda Army Destroying Mines, What About Rebels?', *The East African*, 19 January 2000, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200001190107.html> (accessed 10 January 2013)

<sup>90</sup> Interview with anti-poaching expert, December 2015; 'Museveni doesn't make tracking ivory traffic any easier', *Indian Ocean Newsletter*, Uganda Politics & Power Brokers, N°1398, 27 February 2015, <https://www.africaintelligence.com/ion/corridors-of-power/2015/02/27/museveni-doesn-t-make-tracking-ivory-traffic-any-easier,108064050-art> (accessed 30 March 2016).

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with various oil sector experts in Uganda, July to September 2014; see also 'Refinery contractor's military links raise eyebrows', *Oil in Uganda*, 23 February 2015, <http://www.oilinuganda.org/features/infrastructure/refinery-contractors-military-links-raise-eyebrows.html> (accessed 10 March 2015).

<sup>92</sup> Various interviews in Uganda and Kenya with economists and regional integration specialists, July to September 2014; see also 'Why the Kampala-Kigali railway is off the track', *Africa Intelligence*, Uganda: Politics & Power Brokers N°1417, 18 December 2015, <https://www.africaintelligence.com/ion/corridors-of-power/2015/12/18/why-the-kampala-kigali-railway-is-off-the-track,108117686-art> (accessed 30 March 2016); 'Museveni plays a wicked poker hand on Tanga', *Africa Energy Intelligence*, Uganda Oil N°756, 27 October 2015, <https://www.africaintelligence.com/aem/oil/2015/10/27/museveni-plays-a-wicked-poker-hand-on-tanga,108108525-art> (accessed 30 March 2016).

In summary, China's impact on security dynamics in East Africa occurs through their structural role in providing an alternative global power partner with differing norms and capacities, including the willingness to provide multi-billion dollar financing opportunities for mega-infrastructure construction linked to energy sector interests. Simultaneously, complex local security issues are fed through nefarious, shadowy networks of SALW and illicit goods trading which have Chinese presence to varying extents at various points in supply chains. China has not created the terrorism menace, but nonetheless there are prominent groups utilising Chinese arms and citizen's ivory interests to their advantage. This plays into and helps shape regional geo-political dynamics significantly, as African leaders' competing state building projects vie for regional influence and economic progression. Museveni has proven particularly adept at manipulating both formal EAC regionalism and other regionalisation processes as a means of 'regime-boosting' and maintaining his domestic position in Uganda to suit his own regional security agenda. He has cleverly incorporated Chinese presence into that strategy. Uganda's oil find and geopolitical value is actually rather modest, yet Museveni has used China's regional presence extremely well to help position Uganda as a key driver in the fight against terrorism and link Uganda's oil interests to different EAC partners.

### **The importance of the 'regional'**

As per the broad continental picture presented, East Africa highlights how a regional perspective centralises the role of Africa and Africans within China-Africa relations and how a fluid, back-and-forth influence is occurring. Rebel or terrorist groups utilise the illicit Chinese arms and financial flows to their ends. Beijing has been pushed to engage in anti-poaching efforts and arms dialogues where they cannot feel most comfortable. The thirst or demand for infrastructure, which has been self-evidently lacking for generations, sees African governments now take advantage of Chinese willingness to provide finance and their pursuit of newly discovered oil and minerals. Chinese companies compete amongst many others, however, and have not simply steamrolled into each and every contract. China has not overly influenced which leaders have emerged over the past years, but it is those leaders who now provide the opportunities or pose the challenges that the resurgent China encounters.

### ***Regional case study: centralising Africa***

Similar regional case study analyses would be beneficial for all areas of Africa. This article's broad overview hinted towards unique regional dynamics in each place, but more detailed research into the regionalism and regionalisation underway would uncover the intricacies therein. In the Horn, for example, how exactly is Sudan-Ethiopia rivalry exacerbated or diminished by the infrastructure projects underway or planned? What are the social, development and security consequences of the Djibouti-Ethiopia rail link? In Central Africa, what are the regional implications of Kabila's removal in DRC and what is China's role therein? How do Angolan and Zimbabwean relations with China impact on its rivalry with South Africa in Southern Africa? In West Africa, what is China's role in Ghana's struggling oil sector and how does this affect relations with Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria? And in the North, how has the Arab Spring affected China's opportunities in the region vis-a-vis long standing Western interests? These questions are just a few examples among many possibilities, that would centralise African regional security issues into the China-Africa narrative.

This article's key argument, therefore, is not necessarily the specific findings of the broad regional overview or even the somewhat more detailed East African case study. These were both necessarily brief due to time and space constraints. This article has seen value in the



regionalism and regionalisation concepts articulated by Hettne, but is also not arguing that this is the only valuable analytical framework. It does argue, however, that it is essential to adopt a regional approach to analysing China's African relations, particularly when investigating the security implications of the unfurling developments. This is especially important in ensuring that the much-needed Africa-centric analysis becomes more prevalent in the academic literature. A regional approach demands asking not 'what is China doing in Africa and what are the security implications?'; but instead 'what are Africa's inherently regional security issues and where/how/why does China play a role in them?'.

Framing research questions in this way uncovers different and more relevant answers. In the Horn, for example, the first China-centric question would highlight action such as UN Peacekeepers in South Sudan and anti-piracy efforts in Somalia. The second regional, Africa-centric question would highlight issues such as energy competition amongst regional powers, or the volatile state and nation building processes underway that see a complex web of actors and institutions vying for positions. These are far more significant for regional security and China will likely play a deeper, more interesting role within them. Citizens' lives and security in the Horn will be far more affected by infrastructure like the Djibouti-Ethiopia railway or improved electricity supply (whether coming from Addis or Khartoum), than they will be by a military base being built or a UN peacekeeping deployment. Notably, issues like SALW proliferation may well appear within both forms of questions; but having China as the starting point of analysis risks assuming that they are causing resultant security issues, whereas the Africa-centric regional question highlights the more significant and nuanced role that African leaders play within the proliferation issue.

### ***The role and importance of China***

The regional approach highlights a more serious Chinese role within African security issues than is often noted. Scholars searching for China's security role often uncover various low-level issues. These include human security implications of projects related to displaced communities or working conditions, the increased but still paltry financial contributions to APSA, or Chinese citizen evacuations. China's most serious impacts on African security will not occur by providing funds to the formal regionalism processes underway, or from local market-trader resentments. It will occur through their role in the continent's regionalisation processes and fluctuating security dynamics. These other areas of focus remain relevant, but this regional approach uncovers far more serious, long term, potentially devastating impacts, such as: increased geo-political rivalry amongst regional heavyweights; intensely unstable oil sectors capable of backsliding regional progress by significantly; risky infrastructure projects potentially increasing government debt-burden and continued impoverishment of locals; and the activities of horrifically brutal terrorist groups.

Importantly, this is not about automatically *blaming* China for such findings: it is about uncovering their role, whether intentional or not, in complex African regional security dynamics that have far-reaching implications. China's Africa strategy champions state sovereignty and non-interference, but Beijing is adapting somewhat by engaging security issues through the AU and regional structures.<sup>93</sup> However, whether the AU's APSA delivers stability on the continent, just as whether the connected RECs deliver development, remains intensely uncertain. China's vocal support for such frameworks may become even less significant as new African security mechanisms are created. The Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin, the G5 Sahel, or Gulf of Guinea Commission, for example, do

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<sup>93</sup> Van Hoeymissen, 'China's Security Strategy', pp. 95-96; Courtney Fung, 'Global South solidarity?'.



not automatically conform to the original AU plans or espoused Chinese strategy (or, indeed, to the simplistic carve up of African regions presented in this article).<sup>94</sup>

The fate, relevance and perhaps reimagining of the AU's regional arrangements will play a key role in Africa's security and development trajectory in the coming decades. China's role within those processes will likewise be key in determining their ultimate impact. Unless China provides a more sophisticated appreciation for, and engagement with, Africa's regional and regionalisation processes, it risks mimicking a Western-style 'one-size-fits-all' approach to Africa. The West's ideologically driven neo-liberal economic model and liberal peacebuilding approach has been applied in templated form to a variety of contexts in Africa, with persistently detrimental consequences for African citizens. Although the Chinese method may be different, blanket enforcement of and blind adherence to non-interference may prove equally problematic.

Respect for sovereignty is not a new or innovative approach, but is something of a romanticised call-back to the founding principles of modern international relations which may or may not still be relevant (that uncertainty is especially present in Africa). In regional contexts where sovereignty is hotly contested, or Chinese impact and influence is already being felt regardless of it not being formal 'interference', China would do well to initiate its own regional approach which would necessarily vary across the continent.

## Conclusion

China's most serious impact on African regional security issues (which is actually better phrased as African regional security issues are impacted upon by China) does not occur through Chinese UN peacekeeping, anti-piracy efforts or protection of their own citizens. Instead, it occurs through China's enmeshed role in intra-regional geopolitics, complex local-level security issues, and the behaviour of leaders encountered. The nature of these issues are observably different in each African region.

This article has shown that in East Africa, the nature of regional integration within the East African Community has a noticeable Chinese role. China's interest in natural resources and capacity for infrastructure mega-construction is a key component in regional geo-politics, with Chinese made SALW and China-bound ivory also being tools utilised by a range of sub-state terrorist groups. Leader characteristics and inter-personal relations, with Uganda's Museveni being of particular note, have shaped China's role and influence significantly (and arguably more than Beijing has been able to affect them). African leaders in other regions would do well to learn from lessons emerging from East Africa around how they may utilise Chinese presence for particular benefits while resisting them in certain instances. Hopefully also in how to avoid clashes or regional rivalries from appearing that risk the realisation of those benefits.

The article has also shown that the specificities of broad continental trends and observations vary significantly in Africa region to region. Serious well-researched analysis is required in each region to complement this article's East African starting effort. Any case study investigation of China-Africa relations must recognise and centralise the importance of the *regional* security environment. Notions of statehood and regionalism in Africa continue to

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<sup>94</sup> Olawale Ismail, 'Radicalization and Violent Extremism in West Africa: The Implications for African and International Security', *Journal of Conflict, Security and Development* 14(2), (2013), pp. 209-230; UN Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/10, 24 July 2017, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12922.doc.htm> (accessed 2 August 2018); 'Gulf of Guinea Security', *Maritime Security Review*, 13 August 2012, <http://www.marsecreview.com/2012/08/gulf-of-guinea-security/> (accessed 23 February 2019).

evolve and interact. China's new serious global power role, materially capable of influencing these unfurling processes, must be understood in this regional context to fully appreciate their impact on African peace and security.

Africa's national and regional institutions do not necessarily account for and represent the more complex local realities which shape the lives of African citizens. Nation-state structures in Africa are, at the very least, problematic and contested. In the more severe cases, they are major contributors to people's daily insecurity. China's emphasis upon state sovereignty does not somehow create a reality of empirically sovereign African states that represent the interests of their citizens. Africa's regional frameworks and institutions, likewise, do not necessarily represent or effectively protect people's security concerns. Again, China's perhaps increasing interest in them will not automatically change that reality.

If China's ambition is to strengthen existing national and regional structures, regardless of their contested role in Africa's multifaceted regional security issues, its present methods will likely continue. If China's leaders have a genuine concern for improving the lives of African citizenry, a more challenging regional security approach will be needed. China should be aware of, and react to, its complex role in the regionalisation processes underway, which vary across the continent. This would not be a straight forward process. It requires thoughtful self-reflection on what priorities should be pursued and whose interests should be protected. The ways and means by which China may engage and assist with improving African security – if China decides that is, indeed, a priority – will differ in each regional context. At the same time it would also require supporting continental frameworks and processes. Historically, the West has been stubborn and naïve in its approach to Africa, imposing policies and frameworks which are not suitably adapted to the varied contexts encountered. At present, Beijing also seems unlikely to fundamentally shift its state-centric, sovereignty respecting, largely elite-focused diplomatic engagement, which will likely cause significant issues on both sides of the relationship in the coming years and decades.

### **Notes on contributor**

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